

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 26, 2021

9:07 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Roger Holland, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Shelley Hughes  
Senator Peter Micciche  
Senator Tom Begich

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CONFIRMATION(S) HEARING

Professional Teaching Practices Commission  
Jennifer Stafford - Palmer

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

SENATE BILL NO. 111

"An Act relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to public schools; relating to early education programs; relating to funding for early education programs; relating to school age eligibility; relating to reports by the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to reports by school districts; relating to certification and competency of teachers; relating to assessing reading deficiencies and providing reading intervention services to public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; relating to textbooks and materials for reading intervention services; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to school operating funds; relating to a virtual education consortium; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 111

SHORT TITLE: EARLY EDUCATION; READING INTERVENTION

SPONSOR(S): EDUCATION

03/24/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/24/21	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/26/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

#### **WITNESS REGISTER**

JENNIFER STAFFORD, Appointee  
Professional Teaching Practices Commission  
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as the governor's appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission.

ED KING, Staff  
Senator Roger Holland  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the sectional analysis for SB 111 on behalf of the sponsor.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

9:07:28 AM

**CHAIR ROGER HOLLAND** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:07 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Begich, Stevens, and Chair Holland. Senators Hughes and Micciche arrived shortly thereafter.

#### **CONFIRMATION(S) HEARING(S)**

##### **Professional Teaching Practices Commission**

9:08:20 AM

**CHAIR HOLLAND** announced the consideration of the governor's appointee to the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, Jennifer Stafford. He invited Ms. Stafford to testify.

9:08:31 AM

**JENNIFER STAFFORD**, Appointee, Palmer, Alaska, said that she has been an educator for 17 years. She believes that truly effective education prepares students to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world. She has the passion necessary to improve

the standards and practices within the education profession, which in turn will prepare educators and students for success. Her strength as an educational leader lie in her experience and her sincere desire to grow highly functional educators committed to working together to best serve students. In 2012, she received her administration degree from the University of Alaska Anchorage and in 2016 received a doctorate in K-12 organizational leadership through Grand Canyon University. She has taught all grades, K-8, has been a department leader, assistant principal, instructional leader and a coach and mentor to teachers. She has a broad understanding of how communities influence educators' perspectives and in turn the education profession. She has served on health agency boards. That, combined with her education experience, has helped her to analyze school problems with a broader understanding of major ethical and social economic influences. She also has grounded experience with working with individuals from all walks of life. Along with her knowledge of the education profession, she demonstrates compassion, integrity, and a passion for helping others. Her strong interpersonal skills, sense of humor, and honesty are important tools to be an excellent educational leader.

CHAIR HOLLAND commented that a sense of humor and honesty are core criteria for most occupations in life.

[9:12:17 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH observed that the position is for a classroom teacher and her resume said she is an instructional coach. He asked if she is a classroom teacher.

DR. STAFFORD answered yes, although her title is instructional coach.

CHAIR HOLLAND noted that she teaches a third grade parallel core literacy and skills block class.

DR. STAFFORD said she also teaches smaller groups of students who are struggling with reading.

SENATOR BEGICH asked when she was appointed.

DR. STAFFORD answered in December.

SENATOR BEGICH asked if she is familiar with the code of ethics for educators and if she is prepared to issue reprimands and

suspensions and revocations of teaching certificates for those who might violate that code of ethics.

DR. STAFFORD answered yes.

[9:14:02 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND opened public testimony, ascertained there was none, and closed public testimony.

[9:14:18 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated that in accordance with AS 39.05.080, the Senate Education Standing Committee reviewed the following and recommends the appointments be forwarded to a joint session for consideration:

Professional Teaching Practices Commission

Jennifer Stafford - Palmer

CHAIR HOLLAND reminded members that signing the reports regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects individual members' approval or disapproval of the appointees; the nominations are merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[9:14:59 AM](#)

At ease

#### **SB 111-EARLY EDUCATION; READING INTERVENTION**

[9:16:39 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 111 "An Act relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to public schools; relating to early education programs; relating to funding for early education programs; relating to school age eligibility; relating to reports by the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to reports by school districts; relating to certification and competency of teachers; relating to assessing reading deficiencies and providing reading intervention services to public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; relating to textbooks and materials for reading intervention services; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to school operating funds; relating to a virtual education consortium; and providing for an effective date."

CHAIR HOLLAND noted this was the first hearing for SB 111. It is a committee bill that builds on the work done over several years. He plans to treat it as a starting place to develop something that works for Alaska. In this spirit, his office is already taking notes on potential amendments. As the committee walks through the sectional analysis, he hopes members are willing to discuss and debate components of the bill.

9:17:35 AM

SENATOR MICCICHE arrived.

CHAIR HOLLAND said he hopes to hear from stakeholders about strengths and weaknesses. He presented the sponsor statement for SB 111 that read as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The Academic Improvement and Modernization (AIM) Act is a bipartisan effort to improve reading skills through increased accountability, well placed resources, and by leveraging the modernization efforts we have already begun during the pandemic. This bill affirms it is time to rise to this challenge and invest in the success of our children.

Unfortunately, Alaska currently ranks 50th out of the 50 states in fourth grade reading – even though Alaska spends more per student on education than most other states. This is not a new problem. The data shows Alaska has been well below the national average for decades. And, since at least 2014, the legislature has been debating how to close the achievement gap. It is time for action.

SB 111 seeks to improve our student outcomes through several avenues. First, the bill recognizes that students must be ready to learn when they enter kindergarten. In the most recent assessment of early education quality across the United States, Alaska scored just one out of ten. That is why the AIM Act establishes a financial incentive for districts to improve the quality of their early education programs by allowing districts to include students of high-quality early education programs in the foundation formula. The bill also creates a targeted grant program for low performing districts that need to develop or improve their early education programs.

Next, the AIM Act calls on the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to establish assessment tools, as those described in the nationally acclaimed Florida Model, to identify students that are falling behind. Also referred to as the "Read By 9 Program," this model then directs school districts to provide intervention services to those students that need it. This "testing with purpose" process will provide real help to Alaskan students.

In addition to the assistance provided to students, the AIM Act ensures that teachers are well prepared to meet the challenge. This bill adds six reading specialist positions at DEED that will work directly with teachers across the state to improve the quality of education in Alaska. It also requires the Board of Education to establish training and testing requirements in evidence-based reading instruction.

Finally, SB 111 creates a virtual education consortium, managed by DEED. Such a consortium has been under consideration even before the 2020 pandemic, but this timely effort will leverage the recent investments in virtual learning. It will allow students that did well working remotely to continue to do so and will modernize the way Alaska's teachers access professional development courses.

Thank you for your consideration of the Academic Improvement and Modernization Act.

CHAIR HOLLAND said that student performance is not a new problem. Parents, educators, politicians, and even students have been trying to figure out the solutions for years. He has no preconceived notions that the committee can fix the education problems in Alaska. It will take the good work of legislators, the commissioner, superintendents, teachers, parents, and students to improve the performance of students in Alaska. Hundreds of hours of work went into the previous bills from which SB 111 was constructed. It relies heavily on the past work of others. Most of the proposed changes reflect the simple act of combining previous bills and making changes to conform to the fiscal constraints of the state today. SB 111 has sideboards for fiscal accountability. As an Alaskan senator and chair of the Senate Education Committee, two of his highest priorities are to be accessible and to be willing to listen. In every venue he tries to make himself as accessible as possible. This is first chance to do it on the record. He encouraged people to contact

him in whatever fashion they prefer, email, cell phone, text, or phone calls.

9:22:47 AM

SENATOR HUGHES said this is a big day to have the bill before the committee for the first time. She thanked him because she went to the chair early in the session and said that the concepts in the bill are bigger than any one person and that it could be an Education Committee bill because many senators and hopefully the house can get behind the bill. She loves that the bill is so focused on student outcomes. It will also be helpful to teachers as well. She has heard from teachers in other states who were frustrated until their states had read-by-nine [initiatives] and found it rewarding to be successful after. In the long term, it will be something that teachers love.

SENATOR HUGHES said that it will take a lot to get it up and going, but it will be good for teachers and students. Legislators hear many bills on many important subjects, but for the future of the state and the direct impact on individuals and families, this bill rises to the top. This can change the course of a student's life. Members have all heard that education is key and can be the great equalizer, so someone from a disadvantaged, low-income background can break out of that cycle. But they can only do so if they learn to read. The committee is providing a key to children just being born. More will break the barriers. When she thinks about the future of individual lives, this is positive. When students learn to read and are able to function well in high school and able to move on some form of higher education or training, they are less likely to be dependent on the state, less likely to end up in the correctional system. They are less likely to be on welfare and Medicaid. It will help Alaska overall. That seems like a high goal, but there are so many practical things that this will make more of a difference than just about any bill in the building.

SENATOR BEGICH said he appreciated the opening comments from the chair and the comments from Senator Hughes. A bill that seeks to address the challenges of education in Alaska has to rise to those challenges. Using the baby analogy, the bill is a newborn. He asked what it will be in 15 or 20 years. At this point the bill doesn't rise to the premise of the sponsor statement, but he hopes it does by the end of the process. Right now the bill identifies elements of past bills that were bipartisan, constructed in good faith based on evidence. Pieces of those bills appear in this bill. There is no denying that. The critical elements that are described in the sponsor statement

are ultimately removed from this bill by repeal and the state returns to the early education status quo that preceded this bill. The language even returns to where it is today. Other bills in the committee have been designed to permanently move the state forward, to make a covenant with parents, teachers, and students to show legislators truly believe education can be transformed. His support will depend on whether the committee ends up with a product that truly transforms education. The bill, as he and the chair have discussed, does not do that. It does not fundamentally meet those challenges. The committee will go through a process and walk through the bill section by section and identify those things that are clearly based on evidence and work. In the end, the committee has had many presentations which have underscored the evidence about what will turn the curb for Alaska education. This bill before him does not do that, but the committee should have that robust discussion and go through the process. Hopefully, it will be as Senator Hughes described and all have desired, a bill that will transform education. If it isn't that bill, all will have to take some responsibility.

CHAIR HOLLAND expressed appreciation for the comments and said they will agree to disagree, but he looks forward to hearing where the bill has shortcomings.

9:29:10 AM

SENATOR MICCICHE said he appreciates the committee approach for the bill. Alaska has a problem. The spending is one issue, but the biggest issue is Alaska being the 50th state of 50 states. Alaska has a lot of work to do. He likes many parts of the bill. He is a supporter of early education. Alaska obviously has a problem with reading skills. Senator Hughes captured that well. It is key to improving outcomes. He likes the reading intervention sections. He likes that there is a way for parents to waive a child who is not being promoted. He likes the midyear option for advancement if someone does catch up. The bill has incentives for parents and students and financial incentives for district performance. The committee has a lot of discussion to improve this bill. He is interested in hearing from others to make the best possible bill. He has an open mind about how to make it the best possible legislation to make a difference for the kids of Alaska who are struggling, particularly this year. His kids are going back to the classroom for the first time in over a year, so he likes the virtual education aspects of the bill as well.



SENATOR MICCICHE said he is excited about what the committee can do with this as a starting point. He noted that not everyone is as comfortable with the way it has come together, but it is a new starting point. The committee can work together for the best product possible. He hopes legislators can get something across the finish line that will truly make a difference and perhaps demonstrate a level of effectiveness that continues the programs provided in this bill to perpetuity. If they actually deliver the results the committee thinks they can, he can imagine these programs having the support of Alaskans going forward.

CHAIR HOLLAND stated that he gives his cell phone number out at meetings every chance he gets, and the phone doesn't ring often enough.

9:32:30 AM

SENATOR STEVENS said this bill has been a long time coming. The legislators have discussed this for years. A task force went into great detail. The committee has had a lot of testimony from experts. He is looking forward to the discussion and debate. It is an issue the committee must address. He has been surprised to find there are adults who cannot read, who never had the opportunity to learn to read. In his life he has always been a reader. With two grandchildren, he is in awe of the magic of reading. This is such an important thing. He loves the idea of reading by nine. It is a great hope for the future.

CHAIR HOLLAND asked Mr. King to present the sectional analysis.

9:34:45 AM

ED KING, Staff, Senator Roger Holland, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, said this bill is important not only for current students but for the future economy. As an economist, he sees this as an economic development bill. If this bill is successful in achieving what it is aiming to do, the children who graduate from high schools and go to trade schools and college will be higher skilled and provide higher value-added to the state's economic system. Looking out over the next decade and beyond, this is an important bill from many aspects.

MR. KING said the intent is to present the sectional analysis and hopefully to have discussion along the way.

MR. KING said the title, the Alaska Academic Improvement and Modernization (AIM) Act, is important and meaningful. It is not called the Reading Improvement bill because reading is important for all a student's academic performance. A student who can read

better can do math word problems better. The student can learn science and history and every other topic better. Reading improvement leads to academic improvement. The modernization aspect is for two components. The bill modernizes the way reading in Alaska is approached. It brings Alaska on par with about 30 other states that have adopted comprehensive reading intervention policy. The bill also addresses technology by bringing in the virtual consortium to modernize the state's system by leveraging technology. The acronym AIM is also important. Policies that are deliberate and strategic are effective. The idea of aiming at a target is more effective than a shotgun blast approach.

MR. KING began the sectional analysis for SB 111:

Sec. 1 7/1/21 [Effective Date]

Establishes this Act as the Alaska Academic Improvement and Modernization (AIM) Act.

MR. KING said that Section 2 adds the term "approved by" to reflect that the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) is given additional responsibility to approve pre-K programs, not merely supervise them.

Sec. 2 7/1/21 [Effective Date]

AS 14.03.060(e), relating to the definition of an elementary school, is amended by:

- Changing the term "pre-elementary" to "early education" (defined in sections 10 and 14).
- Adding the term "approved by" to conform to the addition of AS 14.03.410(a)(2) (added by section 10).
- Making clearer the relationship between Head Start agencies and DEED.
- Removing the language regarding ADM count, as it is moved to AS 14.03.410(f) (within section 10) and AS 14.17.500 (section 21).

[9:38:20 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said the title Read by Nine was part of last year's Alaska Reads Act. She asked if SB 111 includes that title and if not, if the committee would entertain that.

MR. KING answered that is not the title of the article added to the bill.

SENATOR BEGICH said the Alaska Reads Act is an identified process that the committee went through for over a year with the

commissioner, governor, and numerous stakeholders who attached their names to the Alaska Reads Act. This bill doesn't meet the standards of the Alaska Reads Act. He would be loathe to call this the Alaska Reads Act. The staff has clearly identified why it is called the Alaska Academic Improvement and Modernization Act. The title is consistent with what the bill is attempting to do. He said he thinks sticking with the current title makes more sense so as to not cause confusion for the public,

CHAIR HOLLAND said that a side-by-side comparison of SB 8 and SB 42 and SB 111 would show that many parts, including the central portion of the Alaska Reads Act, are included in entirety in SB 111.

SENATOR HUGHES said the commissioner was interested in keeping the title Read by Nine for that section. She doesn't see a problem. She respects Senator Begich's thoughts on that. She understands that when she has introduced legislation, it changes during the process. There is enough similarity that she would feel comfortable calling it that. The commissioner did mention that to her. He worked on the bill with Senator Begich and seemed comfortable with that title.

CHAIR HOLLAND said the Read by Nine program is difficult to find in internet searches because it goes by so many different names.

9:42:36 AM

SENATOR BEGICH said that if the bill stays as it is now, all that will be left after 10 years is the Read by Nine component. The bill can be called whatever name, but in the end, after all the repealers in this bill, all that will be left is hard retention and the reading part with none of the supports and none of the early education pieces. All that is left is virtual education and the reading component. If that is the will of the committee, then he does believe they will see an outcry from educators and parents. The staff has made a strong argument for why it is called the AIM Act and he supports that.

CHAIR HOLLAND said this is an agree-to-disagree point. He mentioned fiscal sideboards in his earlier comments. In 10 years, whoever is on the committee will have to evaluate the efficacy of the program. The best legislation has sunsets, programs have to be revisited and reevaluated. The bill makes a change to the foundation formula and it should have that fiscal control.

SENATOR HUGHES said she likes the term AIM; it covers the whole bill. She was just referring to the reading intervention piece. Senator Begich is concerned about the repeal. She sees it as a sunset and a chance for the legislature to review and make improvements to the legislation. If the pre-K pieces are working, there will be data. Legislators put sunsets in a lot of things. It forces legislators to come to the table to consider programs. If it is working well, she would expect that it will continue. If she is convinced about something with a sunset date, she does not worry much about the sunset because the proof will be in the pudding. She doesn't share the same concern. If it works, it will continue.

SENATOR BEGICH said he will address those points as they go through the sectional.

9:45:50 AM

SENATOR MICCICHE said Senator Begich captured his concern. A sectional is to lay out what is in the bill. This bill has 47 sections. The public should know what it is in the bill. He encouraged the committee to move forward [with the sectional] as the committee will have lots of time to discuss the details.

MR. KING continued with the sectional:

Sec. 3 6/30/32 [Effective Date]

AS 14.03.060(e), relating to the definition of an elementary school, is amended in 2032 to reverse the addition of "approved by" in section 2. This change is required to conform with the repeal of AS 14.03.410 (related to early education funding) in section 38.

SENATOR BEGICH asked if the later section removes the criteria for high quality pre-K and Section 22 removes pre-K from the formula because of the sunset provisions.

MR. KING answered yes; the repealer sections, as well as Section 22, are sunset provisions. The drafter's request was to put sunset provisions in the bill.

SENATOR BEGICH said he understood and wants to clarify that DEED would no longer be in a position to approve a pre-K program because the state will be where it is today where the department doesn't have that authority.

MR. KING replied that is correct. If the repeal provision takes effect, then the conforming amendments would also take effect.

MR. KING continued the sectional:

Sec. 4 7/1/21 [Effective Date]

Amends AS 14.03.072, related to providing information to K-3 parents, to incorporate the reading intervention services added by section 33 and changes the word "literacy" to "reading."

SENATOR BEGICH said this segment of the bill was drawn from SB 8 and SB 42 with one exception, the words "culturally relevant" before "intervention strategies" are not included. That was based on documentation DEED provided. He asked if that will be addressed in a committee substitute.

9:49:26 AM

CHAIR HOLLAND said this was the original language from Senate Bill 6, the original version of SB 8 from the previous year.

MR. KING said the culturally responsive language did not translate from SB 8 to this bill, but it is one of more than a dozen potential amendments that are being considered.

SENATOR BEGICH said that Senate Bill 6 changed at the end of the legislative process because the committee worked with stakeholders who reminded the committee and DEED of culturally responsive schools, for which the legislature adopted standards.

CHAIR HOLLAND said he is sure that the amendments will make their way through the process.

SENATOR HUGHES referenced Section 3 that says DEED would need to approve or supervise a Head Start program. She questioned whether DEED oversees Head Start as she thought it was a federal program. The state match for Head Start is \$6 million.

CHAIR HOLLAND replied that DEED will be able to answer that. He asked Mr. King for a response.

MR. KING responded that his intuition is that DEED is not in charge of Head Start agencies. He deferred to the Department of Education and Early Development to answer that question.

SENATOR BEGICH added that DEED has answered that on the record in the committee. Where Section 3 says "including a program operated by a head start agency as a head start program" is simply conforming language with the Head Start statutes. His office has a legal opinion from Legislative Legal that it

provided in the past and can again. The state cannot direct that federal program. The state does have the authority for program supervision over a Head Start within a school, but the state cannot dictate what the program looks like. Most Head Starts are partnerships with nonprofits and other agencies. This language was added by Head Start agencies to an earlier version of the bill to clarify that.

SENATOR HUGHES asked if the chair's intent is to get through the sectional or is it an opportunity to ask questions.

CHAIR HOLLAND said the intent was for light questioning during the sectional analysis with more in depth discussion with invited testimony, but committee members were encouraged to ask questions at this time.

9:53:28 AM

SENATOR HUGHES said that at some point she would like DEED to speak about Head Start and what it means when the department supervises a program. Normally an agency has some input when it supervises a program.

SENATOR BEGICH said he would submit the Legislative Legal memo.

MR. KING said the intent is to continue the sectional at the next hearing and it is helpful to get the questions on the record so they can be addressed going forward.

CHAIR HOLLAND said his office already has plans for changes that Mr. King might bring up during the sectional.

MR. KING said that Section 5 clarifies that reports from the department are not limited to subsection (d) but include all the report under Section 120. The language on page 3, from line 20, onto page 4, line 5, has two paragraphs added. Section 9 of the bill is a separate section of the report, which requires the department to provide information on the implementation of the reading intervention programs.

Sec. 5 7/1/21 [Effective Date]

Amends AS 14.03.078(a), related to DEED reporting requirements, by:

- adding school districts as a recipient of the DEED's annual report.
- expanding the reporting requirement to incorporate all reports in AS 14.03.120, including those listed below.

- adding ratios of administrative employees to students, administrative employees to teachers, and teacher to student ratios to the annual report.
- adding a progress report of the reading intervention programs established by section 33.

SENATOR BEGICH said this section is from SB 8. It had a Section 10 related to reporting on the Teachers as Parents program. He asked why that was removed from the reporting requirements.

MR. KING answered that was missed in drafting and will be addressed in the next draft.

MR. KING said that Section 6 is also about DEED reporting and definitions. This language came largely from SB 42.

Sec. 6 7/1/21 [Effective Date]

Adds two subsections to AS 14.03.078, relating to department reporting requirements, which requires reports to be posted online and defines an administrative employee (as referenced in section 5).

MR. KING said that Section 7 is complicated and is a section identified as perhaps needing additional work. This requires a school-age child to be five before June 1 instead of September 1. There is a lot of history in the language that leads into this section that is related to other sections of law that could be complicated.

Sec. 7 7/1/26 [Effective Date]

Amends AS 14.03.080(d), related to entering public school, by changing the date for early kindergarten start from September 1 to June 1 and applies stronger admission allowance for taking a readiness examination. This section doesn't take effect for five years (section 44).

SENATOR BEGICH said the committee is talking about ensuring that there is evidence that the bill works in Alaska. He asked if there is evidence that supports this section and is this section eventually repealed if it does not work.

MR. KING suggested that Senator Hughes could speak to the intent of this section.

[9:58:53 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES explained that it is based on the evidence from other countries where they begin teaching reading a little later

and testimony from teachers about the difference in the maturity of students entering school. A few months can make a huge difference. This will not kick in immediately to accommodate families and their work schedules. She asked for the effective date.

MR. King answered the effective date for Section 7 is July 1, 2026.

SENATOR HUGHES said that gives families lots of time. It does not keep a child out of school. Four-year-olds could be tested to show they are ready. She has heard from teachers that they appreciate this, but she hears from families not to do this right away because they have not planned on it, so that was why the date was moved out.

CHAIR HOLLAND said Section 7 has no sunset clause, but one could be added.

SENATOR BEGICH said evidence was provided about Finland, Australia, Denmark, and some other countries. Each of those also had consistent early education programs with more than 90 percent [of children] participating. He does not think education policy should have sunset clauses. He is just noting the inconsistency with sunset clauses in some areas of the bill and not others. He is hoping that the sunset clauses with the exception of the grants program will be removed by the end of the process.

CHAIR HOLLAND thanked him for the clarification.

SENATOR MICCICHE asked why not give families an option for an earlier start if the family is prepared for that.

CHAIR HOLLAND said that the bold part of Section 7 talks about how a student with a passing score on an assessment approved by the department may enter public school kindergarten. There will be an assessment to allow children to enter kindergarten even if they turn 5 after June 1.

SENATOR HUGHES clarified that four-year-olds will always have the option to begin early. Kindergarten teachers will say that in their cohorts there are children who could stand to wait a few months. She is hearing that many families decide to wait a year because they would rather their child be at the top of the class rather than the bottom. It is reasonable and the goal is



for the children to have a good experience. If they are not ready to enter, it can be hard on the child and teacher.

10:03:49 AM

MR. KING said this provision is not affected by the bill, but compulsory education under AS.14.30.010 requires that all children ages seven-18 attend a school. Everything prior to the age of seven is voluntary. This provision is related to a voluntary program. Changing this date doesn't prevent students from entering a voluntary pre-K or kindergarten program. It changes, by three months, whether that child needs to take an assessment.

SENATOR BEGICH said that with a good, voluntary pre-K program, this component can work quite well, as Senator Hughes has shown. That is a robust discussion on policy that could lead the committee to a good place.

SENATOR HUGHES said if this piece stays in the bill, the state could be leading in this policy area in the nation. There are kindergarten teachers across the United States with the same situation as kindergarten teachers in Alaska. It is sensible to line it up this way.

CHAIR HOLLAND said the intent is to leave it in the bill, but there is a problem with the phrasing.

MR. KING referred the committee and the public to AS 14.03.080(c), which is not impacted by this bill. That is the readiness assessment for any child under school age, and the bill does not change that. SB 111 will not prevent a child from entering a program if it is the parents' wish.

MR. KING said that Section is also a change to AS 14.03.080 by adding a new paragraph allowing a child who is at least four to enter a pre-K program. It adds a year of voluntary programs.

Sec. 8 7/1/21 [Effective Date]

Adds a subsection to AS 14.03.080, relating to entering public school, which allows a four or five-year-old that is not entering kindergarten to enter an early education program.

SENATOR BEGICH said that is exactly right. It is also designed to narrow the early education component so it doesn't go down as far as three. That is another definition used in Head Start, so it doesn't compete with Head Start

MR. KING said that Section 8 is from SB 8. Section 9 is related to district reporting requirements about the performance metrics to the reading programs.

Sec. 9 7/1/21 [Effective Date]

Adds a subsection to AS 14.03.120, relating to district reporting requirements, which establishes an annual report regarding student performance metrics in kindergarten through third grade.

CHAIR HOLLAND clarified, and Mr. King affirmed, that those programs, the Read by Nine, are what people accept as the Florida model.

MR. KING said that Section 10 was largely built from SB 8. This is a new section of law related to early education with multiple subsections.

Sec. 10 7/1/21 [Effective date]

Establishes early education programs and grants under AS 14.03, which includes the following subsections:

- AS 14.03.410(a) directs the DEED to provide training to help districts develop and approve early education programs.
- AS 14.03.410(b) authorizes DEED to award 3-year early education grants.
- AS 14.03.410(c) requires DEED to rank the districts and determine the eligibility for a targeted early education grant.
- AS 14.03.410(d) limits the number of early education programs eligible for ADM inclusion (section 21) to \$3M per year.
- AS 14.03.410(e) authorizes up to two additional years of grant funding, if the program is not able to qualify for ADM inclusion at the end of the 3-year grant.
- AS 14.03.410(f) requires DEED approval of quality standards for ADM inclusion.
- AS 14.03.410(g) makes clear that the grants are subject to appropriation.
- AS 14.03.410(h) provides definitions.
- AS 14.03.420 codifies the Parents-as-Teachers program.

SENATOR BEGICH suggested that this would be a good time to break.

CHAIR HOLLAND agreed.

SENATOR BEGICH said the chair's process is good. It will allow discussion about each section and fully vet the bill and then provide the chair guidance about choices about where to go with the bill. He thanked the chair for the process.

CHAIR HOLLAND apologized for a 38-page bill, but said this will be an effective way to resolve these questions. He held SB 111 in committee.

10:09:55 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Holland adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 10:09 a.m.